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ABSTRACT

Chapter 3 of a revised handbook on school leadership, this chapter discusses the task of training and selecting the school principal--a key person in efforts to achieve educational excellence. Unfortunately, administrator training and selection methods are often ill-suited to developing and employing outstanding leaders. Traditional avenues to the principalship, including university coursework and teaching and administrative experience, have not proved satisfactory. Practitioners complain the most about deficiencies in graduate training. Three classroom bridging procedures (performance simulations, case studies, and games) offer some promising new training strategies. Various field-based experiences are also recommended, along with school district-sponsored programs. To make principal recruitment less haphazard, the applicant pool must be expanded through outside recruitment, career ladders, internships, and training programs. The principal selection process can be improved by revamping selection criteria and vacancy announcement, screening, and interviewing practices. Innovative principal induction programs, such as peer-assisted leadership, are also needed. Districts can help orient beginning principals by instituting buddy systems, structuring the workload, giving feedback, and developing professional growth plans. Practitioners anxious to capitalize on the coming "window of opportunity" offered by retiring principals can use the above strategies to assess the status of their methods for preparing, recruiting, selecting, and inducting principals. (MLH)

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Chapter 3

Training and Selecting School Leaders

Mark E. Anderson

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Chapter 3

Training and Selecting School Leaders

Mark E. Anderson

Amidst the growing body of research on effective schools and the current call for school reform, the principal has emerged as a key person in the effort to achieve excellence in schools. A principal's leadership is among the most crucial elements necessary for school success, and a successful school almost always boasts of having an outstanding principal. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the important task of training and selecting school principals.

During the 1990s, nearly 60 percent of all current principals in the United States will retire. This decade presents a "window of opportunity" for school districts to hire talented principals who can lead our nation's schools into the Twenty-First Century. As a recent publication on principal selection from the U.S. Department of Education suggests:

> We must take this opportunity to fill our schools with dynamic, committed leaders, for they provide the key to effective schools where we will either win or lose the battle for excellence in education.

Unfortunately, the means by which American principals are trained and selected are often ill-suited to the development and employment of outstanding leaders. School practitioners often voice concern about the preservice training of school principals and contend that university programs do not adequately prepare aspiring administrators for the complexity of the principalship. In addition, several studies and leading educators suggest that school districts may not invest sufficient time, energy, and money to identify, train, select, and induct new principals.

As troubling as this might sound, an encouraging sign—documented in the following pages—is that several districts are willing to make the necessary investments to groom and hire the most capable candidates. In addition, some universities are improving their principal preparation programs, working in cooperation with school districts to bridge the gap between the theoretical concepts of school administration taught in university classrooms and the practical aspects of the principal's role.

This chapter examines the training, recruitment, selection, and induction of principals. It summarizes research and leading educators' opinions on each of these topics and documents strategies that characterize successful programs of principal training, selection, and induction. Administrators, school board members, and aspiring principals who want to capitalize on the coming

"window of opportunity" can use strategies presented in this chapter to assess the status of their principal preparation, recruitment, selection, and induction methods.

Training Principals

Are principals who are outstanding school leaders born, not made? As suggested in chapter 1, most modern researchers, stressing nurture over nature, believe that major competencies of leadership can be learned. Nevertheless, school administrators and trainers of administrators have grappled for some time with identifying effective methods to prepare individuals to be successful principals. Traditional avenues to the principalship, including teaching experience, course work at a university, a practicum, and even a tour of duty as a vice-principal, have not proved satisfactory. Practitioners complain the most, however, about their graduate training.

The Inadequacies of Principal Training

For many years principals have voiced dissatisfaction with the utility of university training in preparing them for the realities of principal life. A 1968 survey of principals found that fewer than 2 percent of elementary principals credited their success as school administrators to their graduate course work (Department of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association). Recent reports show that principals' sentiments toward their preservice training have not changed significantly. Summarizing the state of affairs in 1983 in a policy report, the Southern Regional Education Board (Lynn Cornett) stated that principals' overriding complaint about university training programs is that they are "too theoretical, and do not provide the necessary training to deal with the job."

What is the source of administrators' discontent with their graduate training, and why do not university programs adequately prepare aspiring administrators for the principalship? The central problem, many contend, is that most university programs present knowledge about school administration, but do not help students develop skills to translate that knowledge into practice. Richard Schmuck writes:

> Universities... have traditionally provided sound academic preparation while offering only minimal attention to transforming theory into practice. Moreover, the academic course work in personnel evaluation, law, business management, clinical supervision, and public relations, although competently presenting technique and technical knowledge, offers little opportunity to use that knowledge in coping with real people in real schools.

Edwin Bridges suggests that preparatory programs may even provide experiences that are dysfunctional for those who aspire to be leaders in formal

organizations. By comparing the work of graduate students with the work of managers, Bridges provides a lucid analysis of why university programs may not prepare individuals to deal with the realities of leadership.

The Pace of Work

One problem with university training programs is that they do not prepare aspiring administrators to deal with the quick pace of principals' work. Drawing on Henry Mintzburg's classical study of managers, *Nature of Managerial Work*, Bridges writes, "Manager's work is characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation. The manager's workday is hectic, unpredictable, and riddled with fifty to one hundred different occasions for decisions." Managers are frequently interrupted and often face situations demanding quick decisions.

Academic training programs, on the other hand, require aspiring administrators to spend long hours alone, reading, writing, and contemplating potential solutions to problems. "In comparison with the work pace of managers," Bridges states, "the student's tempo is snail-like. There are few surprises and much time alone." As a result, "the fledgling leader is ill-prepared to handle the accelerated tempo of the managerial role."

Dealing with Conflict

A second major problem with university training is that it does not adequately prepare principal aspirants for dealing with conflict resolution. The way a manager reacts to conflict has a dramatic effect on his or her relationships with employees and on organizational productivity. Bridges notes that managers can use a variety of methods to resolve conflicts. They can engage in win-lose arguing (competition); withdraw or fail to take a position (avoidance); divide gains and seek concessions between parties in conflict (compromise); soothe the parties (accommodation); or confront disagreements and engage in problem solving to find solutions (collaboration).

Leading researchers of leadership and many educators now believe a collaborative style of conflict resolution is likely to foster more productive relationships and enhance the performance of an organization. Bridges suggests that graduate students, however, usually rely on avoidance to resolve conflicts with their classroom teachers. "Collaboration," he writes, "is one of the means least used for resolving conflict."

Communications

A third area of concern is the "character of work-related communications." Administrators typically depend on face-to-face communication to accomplish their work. "Approximately seventy percent of the manager's time involves face-to-face communication with others," Bridges writes. The graduate student, on the other hand, spends more time in reading and writing activities than in work-related personal interactions. Bridges concludes, "there

are clearly major discrepancies in the modes of communication that are most relevant to the work of students and that of managers."

Emotions of Work

A final difference between university training and managers' work deals with the emotional content of the workplace. Feelings are usually irrelevant in graduate training programs, which stress the value of ideas and rationality. "Rarely is the student forced to cope with the emotions of others or to witness situations where people constructively and openly work through their emotional difficulties," Bridges writes. School administrators, however, deal with emotions constantly. Angry parents, excited students, and aroused staff members are commonplace in a principal's work environment. "Periods of emotional tranquility," Bridges notes, "are punctuated by episodes of emotional turbulence" in a manager's work day.

It is unlikely, Bridges concludes, that graduate training programs prepare aspiring administrators for the realities of managerial work. The placid emotional environment of the student may even result in the "trained incapacity" of future leaders. His analysis clearly points out areas that universities must address to transform their programs into relevant training experiences for aspiring principals.

Assessments such as Bridges', combined with complaints from practitioners and increased national attention on the importance of a principal's leadership, are stirring the demand for changes in the methods that universities and school districts use to train aspiring administrators. The next section examines recent calls for reform in principal preparation, followed by promising strategies and practices that may improve the preparation of school leaders.

Calls for Reform

During the last decade, effective schools research has focused national attention on the importance of a principal's leadership. Virtually all reviews of research on effective schools point to the critical role that a principal plays in school success. Although correlational studies that have tried to link principal leadership behaviors with student achievement have yielded no significant relationships, it is clear that effective schools research has contributed to the current practice of zeroing in on the principal as the key agent for achieving educational excellence.

As a result of this new-found attention, the preservice training of principals has come under increased fire from scholars, national commissions, and, again, principals themselves. Collectively, these criticisms are aimed at colleges of education and school districts for not providing the field-based experiences necessary for developing outstanding principals.

Kathleen McCormick, citing the 1986 National Governors Association report *Time for Results*, says the certification of principals is currently not based on results, but on educational requirements. "Too often, a candidate's

ability to provide instructional leadership does not have to be demonstrated and is not even considered." The National Governors Association report recommends that public schools become more actively involved in the preparation of principals by making clinical experiences a key element in training, certifying, and hiring principals.

One year later the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), in *Leaders for America's Schools*, expanded on these same concerns. The UCEA report states that research reveals troubling aspects throughout the field of principal preparation, including lack of collaboration between school districts and universities and lack of preparation programs relevant to the job demands of school administrators. Universities, school districts, and professional organizations should cooperate more fully in the preparation of school principals, the report argues.

Educators have proposed and tried several promising strategies and practices that begin to meet the call for reform of principal preparation. Although these strategies are not perfect solutions to improving the training of principals, they are examples of what several institutions are doing to bridge the gap between the theoretical and technical concepts of school administration taught in the university classroom and the requirements of professional practice in the field.

Promising Training Strategies

To close the gap between classroom and practice, most preparation programs for principals now require some type of internship or practicum. A report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), *Performance-Based Preparation of Principals: A Framework for Improvement*, states that field experiences at the conclusion of a student's course work are often the "sole mechanism of preservice preparation by which the gap is bridged." Although field-based experiences are needed, "such an approach," the report argues, "ignores or makes trivial the breadth of the gap to be spanned."

The NASSP report suggests that a variety of carefully designed bridging procedures must occur in the classroom prior to or in conjunction with field experience. These classroom bridging procedures should:

- emanate from appropriate theoretical constructs of the profession and other related disciplines
- provide application in relatively "safe" settings where students can make mistakes and learn from them
- encourage repetitive applications so that students can practice effective behaviors
- place students sufficiently close to the field setting so that the remainder of the transition can be made with a minimum of difficulty.

The following sections highlight three classroom bridging procedures: performance simulations, case studies, and games.

Performance Simulations

Performance simulations are one strategy that university trainers can use to begin bridging the gap between classroom and field. Simulations recreate real-life situations where the student must quickly plan and take actions to solve problems that school principals typically face. Simulations include inbasket exercises, group activities, stress exercises, and teacher observation simulations, to name a few.

Developed initially for industrial training, several empirical studies, reported by Bernard Bass, found that managers trained using simulations performed significantly better on supervisory assessments and were perceived by followers as better leaders than those given a traditional course on the principles of leadership. Borrowing the simulation idea from business, NASSP developed a number of simulations for its Assessment Center project. In validation studies of NASSP simulations, Neil Schmitt and his colleagues found high correlations between principals' performance on the simulations and their actual on-the-job behavior. Simulations' greatest drawback, according to NASSP, is that "too few excellent simulations are available, making repeated applications unfeasible."

Case Studies

A second classroom bridging procedure uses case studies rich in descriptions and contextual details of real-life school situations to help aspiring principals develop analytical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. According to Vivian Clark, "case studies capture [the] brevity, variety, and fragmentation in the principalship and demonstrate the attempts by various principals to meet these demands of the job."

Clark recommends that trainers of principals use case studies for class discussions, for examination of the basis for principal decisions and their effectiveness, and for self-analysis of how the student might handle the situation. Although "case studies do not provide panaceas for training principals, . . . they can be a very useful training tool and should not be overlooked," she concludes.

Games

Organizational, institutional, and business games, a third bridging strategy, are living cases where trainees make sequential decisions and then live with them. During games participants experience success and failure more fully than in other types of simulations. Wilderness labs are an example of a training game that has achieved widespread recognition and use from corporations such as AT&T, Xerox, General Electric, and Marriott.

Although wilderness labs have not been used much in education, a new principal training program at the University of Oregon uses this training activity as part of its principal preparation program. According to Richard Schmuck, the program's director, the focus of Oregon's wilderness lab is on leadership development and team building. The lab takes place on a "Ropes Course"

owned and operated by a 4-H organization near Salem, Oregon.

"Aspiring principals take on a series of structured mental and physical challenges designed as metaphors for professional challenges in a school," says Schmuck.

> Success depends not on physical strength or athletic skill, but on a team's ability to solve problems creatively, allocate diverse resources effectively, maintain commitment of team members, and develop support networks. After each challenge, the participants as individuals and the teams reflect on the process: What contributed to team effectiveness? What fueled or took away energy and commitment of individuals? How might we apply what we're learning to the school? By the end of the weekend, insights from the woods are translated into action plans for the school.

According to the NASSP report, university training programs do not use performance simulations, case studies, games, or other classroom bridging procedures very extensively.

> Most programs use them only in minimal ways. No program, perhaps, uses them to an optimum degree. Some of this neglect is attributable to the small number and variety of bridging procedures. A greater proportion of the problem may be due to lack of recognition that performance-based learning is important for sufficient transfer of theory to practice.

NASSP recommends a massive professional effort to develop more and better classroom bridging procedures, to disseminate them, and to incorporate them into preparation programs.

Field-Based Experiences

In addition to classroom bridging procedures, various field-based experiences are also being recommended for the preservice training of principals. This section features three types of field-based experiences: course-based field activities, practica, and internships.

Course-Based Field Activities

It is helpful for aspiring administrators to explore various aspects of the principal's role directly in the field. In course-based field activities, trainers require students to complete assignments such as conducting field interviews and observations that add a practical dimension to the academic content of courses. Some course-based assignments include

- observing a school board meeting, negotiations sessions, student discipline hearing, or faculty meeting
- interviewing administrators on a specific topic such as developing a building budget, bringing about a change in a program, or designing a staff inservice plan

- observing and then conducting a teacher observation and postconference
- interviewing a school board member or political leader on issues central to education

The best field activities are those that enable students to see how theoretical or technical aspects of school administration can be put into practice. In addition, trainers in effective programs instruct students on various observation and interview recording techniques prior to their field-based assignments. Finally, they assist students in carefully analyzing information collected in the field. Without critical analysis and reflection, the activities are primarily passive in nature and may not help students develop useful insights.

Practica

Practica are another field-based activity that can help aspiring administrators begin to make the transition from theory to practice. A practicum is usually a significant project, at least one semester in duration, in which students demonstrate administrative skills. In exemplary training programs, the student is accountable for planning, implementing, and evaluating one or more projects.

Practica should occur not only near the end of students' university training sequence, but throughout their preparation. With this approach, universities and school districts can use the practicum as part of a career guidance plan that helps those interested in administration to "test the water" before deciding to pursue administration as a career. Unfortunately, the current practice in most universities is to schedule practica experiences near the end of preservice education, after students have already invested so much time and money in their training that a brief exposure to reality in the field is unlikely to change their minds about wanting to be administrators.

A second criteria for a successful practicum experience is that university faculty members and school district administrators work together in closely supervising and providing helpful feedback to students on their projects. According to the NASSP, university supervisors, school district administrators, and even fellow students need to carefully analyze and constructively criticize students' practicum projects. "The ability of the student to receive and utilize relevant criticism," the report argues, should be "one of the criteria applied in assessing practicum outcomes."

A final criteria for an exemplary practicum experience is a requirement that students bring about a change, minor or major, in some aspect of a school's structures, norms, or traditional procedures, as they work directly with people involved in the school. Thus, relevant practicum assignments will probably require some release time from an aspirant's regular duties. University faculty and school administrators should also provide students with information and ideas on successful change strategies and carefully guide aspiring administrators through a change process.

Internships

If carefully designed and supervised, internships come nearest to helping aspiring principals realize fully the sweep and complexity of an actual principal position. The idea of internships, which give prospective principals a chance to try their hands at real-life school administration, is not new; full-time internships are, however, still the exception rather than the rule. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching favored extensive internship experiences for principal hopefuls in its 1983 study, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*. Carnegie's president, former U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest L. Boyer, recommends a one-year administrative internship in which the candidate works closely, on a full-time basis, with an experienced and successful principal.

In his 1983 landmark study *A Place Called School*, John Goodlad also called for lengthy internship experiences. "It is simply not established procedure in the educational system to identify and groom cadres of the most promising prospects for top positions, as is the case with IBM, for example." Goodlad believes school districts must be willing to make an investment designed to pay off in the future, scheduling candidates for paid, two-year study programs carefully planned to balance academic study and one or more internships as assistant principals.

Internships will not produce outstanding leaders unless they are carefully designed, supervised, and scheduled over a sufficient period. Schmuck lists several reasons most internships have not been effective:

> (1) the preparation does not occur over sufficient time; (2) the preparers—the university professors and field supervisors—do not collaborate closely enough; (3) efforts are not deliberately planned to establish trainees' cognitive linkages between theory and practice; (4) insufficient attention is given to both personal-emotional development of the trainees and the social support they receive throughout the internship; and (5) although interns have received supervision from experienced administrators, they have not in the main received mentoring, that is, close and supportive help in an egalitarian and collegial relationship.

On the basis of his study of beginning principals, John Daresh believes that districts' failure to grant release time for aspiring administrators may be a significant roadblock for effective training experiences. He states that most internships and practicum experiences usually consist of

> synthetic situations where aspiring principals, in most cases full-time teachers unable to get district support and approval for release time, find some quasi-administrative tasks that can be performed during the time that is not assigned during the school day to teaching or other duties. As a result, people are being prepared to serve as instructional leaders by spending five to ten hours per week supervising bus loadings, calling the homes of truant students, filling out forms for the central office or the state department of education,

> or devising new student handbooks. These activities are, no doubt, useful for the smooth operation of a school, and many practicing administrators are engaged in these activities every day. However, to rely on projects such as these to give anyone a clear picture of the multifaceted nature of most principals' jobs is truly ludicrous.

Daresh also suggests that the assumption behind such training—competence comes from practical experience—may be false. "Simply assuming that one learns by doing practical things is an incorrect assumption," he writes. Daresh contends that aspiring administrators need to spend a great deal of time reflecting on and analyzing the skills they learn in the field and the activities in which they are engaged. "Practice without reflection," he notes, "is not of great value to learning anything." Thus, Daresh recommends that trainers carefully guide students through a reflective learning cycle to improve students' administrative abilities and insights. "This guidance takes time and requires a true concern for the learner as an individual." Unfortunately, "preparation of administrative candidates in many universities is not a very personalized process."

Several university-school partnerships are underway that begin to address the shortcomings of past internships. For example, Bibb County Public School System in Georgia developed an exemplary internship program in cooperation with the University of Georgia. According to Thomas Hagler and others, aspiring administrators spend an entire year in a full-time internship in the program. In addition to working full-time under the helpful supervision of experienced administrators, the interns observe other principals in the district; attend monthly seminars conducted by the superintendent and his staff; meet twice a month with the university coordinator; and attend bimonthly seminars with other interns to share frustrations and triumphs, pose problems and offer solutions, reflect on their activities, measure their own perceptions and experiences against those of their peers, and develop support networks.

Interns at Bibb County also take a five-credit-hour university course each quarter on topics such as Introduction to Supervision, Administration of the School Curriculum, and Public School Business Administration that link course work to intern activities. University faculty members and school district administrators also work together in carefully designing and closely supervising each intern's program.

School Systems Invest in Training

Although our focus so far has been mainly on university training programs, probably the most crucial ingredient in preparing capable school leaders is individual school districts. Without the financial and emotional support of senior school administrators and school boards, the prospects for "growing a healthy crop" of new principals who can effectively lead our nation's schools during the upcoming decades is highly unlikely.

Exemplary training programs will certainly cost money. According to

Catherine Baltzell and Robert Dentler, "The extent to which the school system invests in the preparation of principals is an index to other aspects of system quality." Baltzell and Dentler found that many districts are not willing to make such an investment and, consequently, do not have a qualified pool of potential candidates from which to choose when an opening occurs.

Baltzell and Dentler cite some districts that do provide the necessary training for prospective principals. For example, Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland began its leadership transformation efforts twenty years ago. In its Administrative Training Program, potential principals apply for and take a ten-week afterwork course on leadership. Graduates may then opt for a second eighteen-week, three-credit course in administrative leadership, which includes skill development.

After candidates complete this two-part sequence, senior administrators review all performance and related educational records of applicants and rank them from one to four. Highest scoring candidates who are still interested in the principalship are then invited to "Administrative Competence Seminars," where their interpersonal skills, communication and conceptual skills, and group leadership skills are formally assessed by a panel of senior administrators. Candidates are given points for their performance on each of the activities in the competence seminars, and are again ranked.

Top-ranked individuals are then placed in internships as full-time assistant principals for one year. Under the guidance of successful administrators, interns obtain experience in such areas as instructional leadership, staff and pupil personnel management, community involvement, and professional growth. At monthly seminars held with interns and their supervisory team, interns present an analysis of their log of daily activities and share a selected activity for group analysis and discussion. Each intern also completes a needs assessment on his or her strengths and weaknesses that is used to form a specific training plan designed to extend the intern's knowledge and skill in such areas as leadership, management, and supervision.

Training programs like the one in Montgomery County Schools are highly desirable but still very rare, according to the U.S. Department of Education report on principal selection.

The dismal prospects of inadequate district training programs for school principals are not without hope. Baltzell and Dentler found other districts beginning to meet the challenge of training future school leaders. My own research in Oregon identified districts making the necessary investments of time and money to groom capable principals. It is hoped that more districts will begin to realize that the training of capable leaders must begin long before they are needed.

Effective training programs are, of course, only the first step in hiring capable principals; recruitment, selection, and induction are other essential components in a comprehensive system that trains, obtains, and retains the most capable school leaders.

Recruiting Principals

Recruiting capable candidates into principal positions may be the most important task that school superintendents and school boards face in the next few years. With predictions that more than half of current principals will retire during the next decade, districts have a golden opportunity to hire many outstanding newcomers. As a senior personnel administrator in a suburban Northwest school district says, sophisticated recruitment and selection processes are now a necessity. "We are in a very competitive business, and we must make sure, through our process, we don't miss the best candidates."

Unfortunately, many districts haphazardly recruit principals, often missing the most capable candidates. Goodlad (in an interview by Sally Zakariya) said that the recruiting and hiring of principals is "to say the least casual. Most new principals are plucked out of the classroom in June and plunged into the job soon after."

Robert Dentler likewise believes the principal recruitment and selection process is "ridden with chance" and often does not conform to sound policy. As he told Zakariya,

> In most places, principal recruitment and selection still operates on the buddy system. Without changes in the integrity and vitality of the selection process, the ablest educational leaders may never turn their faces towards the principalship.

The recruitment of outstanding principals is too important to be left to chance. Patronage, favoritism, or familiarity should not be allowed to edge out merit. Goodlad, Dentler, and many other observers recommend that school districts begin grooming future principals long before they are needed to develop a pool of qualified candidates from which to select the brightest and best.

A Limited Pool of Capable Candidates

Although the pool of principal candidates is large—many individuals hold appropriate certification— there is reason to believe the number of "highly capable" applicants may be dwindling. Through interviews with school leaders for *The Executive Educator*, Kathleen McCormick was able to document a growing concern about a pending shortage of "rising stars" for the principalship. Scott Thompson, executive director of the 42,000-member NASSP, told McCormick, "We don't have enough top-notch people to fill the jobs."

Superintendent Frank Cleary of Binghamton, New York, told McCormick, "I don't see as many people coming up through the system who have the burning desire to climb the administrative ladder." One reason, Cleary explained, is that teaching itself is becoming a more attractive career: salaries are improving and teachers are being given greater control over and responsibility for what happens in the classroom. "Teachers spend more time looking at the pros and cons of administration," he says. Because of the high cost of moving

and complications resulting from two-career families, he added, "the list of cons outweigh the pros, unless you can stay in the same district."

As discouraging as all this might sound, education leaders do agree the next few years will open up vast opportunities for talented and dedicated newcomers, including women and minorities. Effie Jones, associate executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, told McCormick, "There are plenty of talented women and minorities who are now certified to take administrative positions." Scott Thompson agrees "there are more strong women candidates than ever before." In the end, says McCormick, the exodus of experienced principals "might be just the window of opportunity that women and ethnic minorities have been waiting for. That is, if today's school leaders take the initiative to help train them."

Ways to Expand the Applicant Pool

Several studies call for school districts to make a concerted effort to expand the pool of qualified principal applicants. Outside recruitment, indistrict training programs, career ladders, and internships are all ways for districts to exert such effort.

Outside Recruitment

According to Goodlad, "School districts would be well advised—and perhaps should be required—to select, for posts available, from a pool of qualified applicants extending far beyond district lines." This procedure does not nullify a district's investment in principal preparation, he adds. "With all districts similarly engaged in the process, interest from investments would be shared."

School districts too often limit their vacancy announcements to narrow geographic areas. The U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide* criticizes this practice and recommends that

> announcements should be placed in large circulation newspapers in cities within a 500-mile radius of the vacancy. If the district is itself in a large city, the search committee might advertise the opening in similar cities. To avoid becoming too ingrown, search committees should advertise in principal and superintendent newsletters, in education journals, and in the publications or at the conferences of professional associations. There are many options, but the most important thing is to avoid a narrow search that ends too soon.

Outside recruitment does not consist of simply advertising vacancies beyond local boundaries, but also focuses on finding and targeting individuals in other districts who are perceived as highly desirable candidates. According to Baltzell and Dentler, "If all goes well, the outsider is ultimately brought in. However, it is usually an outsider with a firm inside connection to the network." Districts with limited pools of applicants rarely recruit in such a manner.

School districts would also be well advised to work closely with other districts, state administration associations, women educational administration associations, and various groups of minority educators to encourage and recruit applicants from all groups in the population. As one superintendent who has been particulary successful at recruiting capable women administrators says, "we are attempting to recruit our leadership from the whole population, not just half of it."

Career Ladders

Career ladders are another means by which to expand the pool of qualified applicants, but, again, this method is more the exception than the rule in many school systems. Career ladders can include positions for curriculum and staff development specialists, head teachers, department chairs, deans, and assistant principals.

Altough career ladders are a way to test applicants' leadership abilities, many times districts do not provide individuals with the diversified experiences in these positions that are necessary for grooming outstanding principals. This is especially true of the assistant principal position, as James Lindsay notes:

> Too few assistant principals are groomed for higher positions; they receive narrow, theoretical training, and the on-the-job experience they have is just as narrow. Usually, an assistant principal is treated as a single-facet administrator—prepared, for instance, to be only a disciplinarian or only a director of activities. As a result, most assistant principals learn only a few of the many job skills they need to be good principals.

Lindsay believes in providing assistant principals with experience in all facets of building administration to improve a district's pool of trained and tested principal candidates. Principals themselves, Lindsay notes, play an important role in this training process:

> As a principal, you owe it to your assistants to help them develop into well-rounded, qualified professionals who are prepared to move into new, challenging positions. There's no magic to the process. All it requires is dedication and the willingness to make school administration a superior form of continuing education.

Internships and Training Programs

As noted earlier, internships and district training programs are other means to attract, train, and expand the applicant pool. To be effective, teachers must perceive these training opportunities as accessible, open, valuable, and professional. According to Baltzell and Dentler, candidates in the exemplary districts have a much greater sense of passing through a sequence of ever-narrowing gates as they are "weeded out" through credible training programs and internships.

A Northwest district's recruitment and training program provides a

practical example of what school districts can do to improve the pool of principal candidates from which to recruit the most capable leaders. In January 1987, the David Douglas School District in Portland, Oregon (1987-88 enrollment approximately 6,000 students in 11 schools) launched its STAR (Selecting and Training Administrative Recruits) program for identifying, recruiting, and training prospective principals from within the district's teacher corps.

Of STAR's three phases, the first involves a series of ten weekly after-work classes about educational administration, specific to David Douglas. Each class covers different aspects of administration, taught by a team of David Douglas administrators. Training focuses on the practical realities of what principals do, including both the frustrations and the joys. Topics are grouped according to four roles of the administrator:

> *A member of the administrative team.* An opening session includes presentations by the superintendent and principals from the elementary, middle, and high school levels on the administrative team structure in the district and each member's responsibilities.
>
> *Educational program coordinator.* Directors of programs such as special education, instructional materials, music, and PE outline their respective roles and relationship with district principals.
>
> *Instructional leader.* Principals and the curriculum director focus on components of an instructional leader such as research, classroom strategies, staff development, evaluation of programs, and skills in dealing with people.
>
> *A building manager.* Supervisors from business, transportation, food service, and data processing discuss their interaction with school principals and the principal's extensive involvement in these various areas of district operations.

Other sessions in phase 1 include the role of the administrator as disciplinarian, personnel manager, community relations specialist, financial wizard, and first-year rookie. All sessions include opportunities for class participation by means of questions and answers, brainstorming sessions, and small group work.

Phase 2 of STAR includes a week-long practicum experience, based on a plan that each participant designs in phase 1. During this phase, mentor relationships are established between participants and administrators. Interested candidates also attend an assessment center for evaluation and training.

In the final phase, the district establishes formal internships with building principals for interested and successful candidates. In addition, the district offers a series of workshops in the second year of the program that further explore topics in educational leadership.

Although STAR is designed to provide David Douglas teachers with information about becoming a principal in their own district, participants take the class for several reasons. Some are in the process of getting their administrative credentials and want to get the David Douglas perspective on what they

have learned. Others are undecided about wanting to go into administration and take the classes to help them decide. The STAR program provides participants the needed insights into school administration to help them make that decision. The program also sends an important message to employees that the district values their competence and is interested in supporting their investigation of and preparation for school administration.

Pattern for Effective Recruitment

In sum, aggressive school districts do not leave the identification and recruitment of outstanding principals to chance.

Long before specific vacancies arise, they identify a pool of potential leaders and develop a "pipeline" to the principalship. District training programs, internships, and the assignment of teachers to various leadership roles are all ways to groom a cadre of capable candidates. Better yet, a training and internship program that welcomes women and minority candidates can offset any built-in disadvantages for these groups.

Aggressive districts not only train their own people for future principalships, but also aggressively recruit outside the district. Advertising widely in college job placement bulletins and professional organizations' newsletters is one outside recruitment means. Targeting talented individuals in other districts and helping them establish an entry to the district's network is another recruitment strategy. Districts increase their odds of finding the best candidates when they welcome a large number of applicants.

Selecting Principals

At the core of hiring the most capable principals is the selection process. As we will see, several studies suggest that many school districts may not select the best candidates. There are two possible explanations for this deficiency: (1) districts' vacancy announcements and selection criteria are nonspecific, and (2) districts use inadequate screening and selection techniques. This section suggests ways to strengthen vacancy announcements, selection criteria, screening and assessment methods, and interview procedures.

Vacancy Announcements

Principal selection begins with the declaration of a vacancy. Far too often, districts, especially large ones, do not specify in the vacancy announcement the particular school where there is an opening. Rather, the announcements call for applications for the principalship in general. Although most districts hire principals to serve in various schools during their tenure, there are good reasons to specify the particular school where a vacancy occurs. Districts are more likely to attract appropriate candidates when they list informa-

tion concerning the special needs and characteristics of a school in the vacancy announcement. In addition, selectors can assess and match candidates' skills and leadership styles with the particular needs of a school in order to select the right person for the job.

Laura Fliegner argues that districts should provide the following types of information in vacancy announcements:

- needs to be accomplished by whoever fills the position
- important characteristics of the existing staff
- student's family background, cultures, extracurricular concerns, and feelings about school
- information about other executives in the school system

Unfortunately, too many changes in assignments may be necessary in larger school systems, requiring them to develop more comprehensive, general standards. Baltzell and Dentler warn that "when the resulting set of standards becomes too general, the generalities detract from the vacancy pool and from screening efforts."

Selection Criteria

The best districts take the necessary time and care to clearly define and articulate what they are looking for in a principal and how they will determine if a candidate meets selection criteria. Developing clear criteria increases a district's likelihood of hiring a top-notch principal. Exemplary districts, therefore, decide in advance what kinds of evidence they will gather to use in appraising candidates. Lorri Manasse argues that

> School districts need to make more explicit their criteria for selecting principals. If they are to move toward an instructional component in their definition of principal effectiveness, they need to clearly articulate selection and evaluation criteria that reflect that definition.

Baltzell and Dentler agree:

> Even when a district clearly aligns a vacancy with a specific school, many districts do not spell out criteria pertinent to educational leadership such as experience with program planning, budgeting, staff development and evaluation, plant management, or community relations.

The following criteria, spelled out as part of one school district's principal vacancy announcement, provide an example of the kind of specificity needed. Each district, however, must individually develop criteria that reflect the qualifications they seek.

Required Qualifications

- A record of exemplary teaching experiences
- Outstanding performance as a school improvement leader

- A record of successful community relations
- Demonstrated leadership in clinical supervision

Preferred Qualifications

- Instructional Theory Into Practice (ITIP) training and supervisory experiences
- Staff development experiences
- Knowledge of effective schools research
- Leadership experience as a principal or administrator
- Completion of NASSP Assessment Center simulations

Personal Traits

- A sensitivity to people
- A rapport with students
- The ability to inspire colleagues and students
- The ability to write and speak articulately
- A sense of humor
- The ability to encourage and use the information and opinions of diverse groups in decision-making
- Strong organizational skills

Many districts defer the definition of such criteria until a candidate pool has been formed and review begun, say Baltzell and Dentler. "This lack of criterial specificity opens the way for widespread reliance on localistic notions of fit or image." For example, many districts in their study had a deeply held image of a "good" principal or a "top" candidate or "just what they were looking for." But instead of hiring a candidate for his or her skills or merit, these districts relied more on how a candidate would fit into the district and maintain the existing system. The hiring officials were swayed by their perceptions of a candidate's physical presence, projections of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and district's methods of operation.

Baltzell and Dentler found that districts employing exemplary selection practices give priority to "merit" over "fit." In the exemplary districts, selection teams looked for principals who could institute effective change and who would not just maintain the status quo. Based on their desire to hire effective change agents, these districts also used a well-defined set of criteria to systematically sort and rank candidates before selecting finalists for interviews. Without such clear sets of criteria by which to screen and select candidates, the probability of districts hiring the most capable principal is certainly diminished.

Screening

Screening typically involves two steps, which increase in importance. First, the personnel office normally screens resumes and applications to determine the candidates who meet minimal certification and experience standards. Next, there is a more formalized paper screening of eligible candidates who pass

the initial screening. It is here where many districts begin to falter.

Fliegner believes school districts need to create comprehensive job descriptions and selection criteria, calling for feedback from representatives of staff members, students, community members, and administrators. Next, she says, "A district must develop a screening scheme and standardized ranking system by which screeners can systematically judge each applicant's file against their predetermined standards."

Exemplary districts have screeners conduct blind ratings of each candidate, in which screeners assign a numerical score to each candidate's lengthy application and reference documentation. Assuming districts effectively handle these important preliminary steps, the issue of who screens is another problem.

Who Screens?

In his treatise on *Victims of Groupthink*, social psychologist S. L. (Irving) Janis uses the term "groupthink"

> to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivations to realistically appraise alternative courses of action

Finding signs of "groupthink" in the districts they studied, Baltzell and Dentler note that the tendency often occurs in districts where a small, close-knit group of senior administrators do all the screening. Over time, they lose their ability to correct each other's errors and judgment. The researchers say that

> without some other participation (parents, teachers, principals, or students) screening loses its external credibility. It appears to take place in a way no one can attest to as trustworthy or well executed, except by the same team members.

An assistant superintendent of personnel in a medium-size suburban district said the inclusion of building principals and teachers on the screening and interview committee allows the district to "get various perspectives on all dimensions of what a principal candidate should be." This participation also makes the process fair and precludes "a 'good-old-boy' network where a favorite of the central office administration is preselected," he said.

Involving teachers, principals, parents, and even students on screening committees is one way a district can combat the "groupthink" syndrome. Exemplary school systems place a heavy reliance on the participation of school-based as well as district-level administration and staff for screening and selecting principals.

Assessment Centers

A promising option for screening potential principal candidates is the assessment center. Using an idea borrowed from the business world, the

NASSP began the first assessment center in 1975. It is one of the most flourishing approaches in education to identify and screen prospective candidates.

Having candidates experience a variety of simulations, the assessment center helps districts pinpoint potential principals' specific strengths and weaknesses in a dozen job-related areas: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation and educational values. According to Zakariya, "The result is a 12-dimensional profile of each candidate, which can be used as a prescription for professional development as well as a screening device."

Unfortunately, the cost of assessment centers deters many districts from participating. As Dentler told Zakariya, "They are fairly expensive and cumbersome to put into place. People are looking for shortcuts, and there just aren't any." No shortcuts might, in fact, may be a fitting epitaph for the old-fashioned wink-and-nod school of picking principals. "When you spend time and effort on selecting good principals," says Dentler, "you get both short-term and long-term payoffs—not just good leaders, but good system operations."

Written Assessments

Districts that use exemplary selection strategies also require some type of written communication as part of the screening or selection process. Writing assignments can help screeners begin to assess a candidate's philosophies and written communication skills. In one district I investigated, candidates are asked to respond to a series of pertinent questions, devoting a half-page essay to each question. Some examples of these questions are as follows:

1. What are some key descriptors of leadership and management? Give some examples of how you personally have used these elements to advantage.
2. Entrenched faculties and organizations can often be resistant to change. What processes will you employ in moving a school organization toward your envisioned change?
3. As a principal new to our district you choose to introduce yourself to the staff by providing working definitions of *teaching* and *learning*. How do you introduce yourself.
4. Recently the local paper editorialized that only after parents got involved in the schools has education improved. How will you direct into productive channels the energies of an active school community?

Having the applicants provide several short written essays "gives us a good idea of how candidates express themselves in writing: how they think," a senior administrator told me. In addition, "we have a strong feeling about the use of language as a mark of an educated person. Candidates have told us that our written exercise forced them to focus their philosophy into a succinct statement and quickly get to the crux of key issues."

The Interview

The interview is the most widely used selection technique and the technique most influential in hiring decisions. Yet the interview, if used incorrectly or used as the sole basis for hire, is neither valid nor reliable. According to Mary Cihak Jensen:

> Typically, the interview is unstructured, lasts less than one hour, and is highly influenced by first impressions, appearance, nonverbal behavior, and conversational skills.

Some studies suggest that interviewers may arrive at their decision to hire or reject an applicant within the first five minutes of the interview. The remainder of the interview can become a seeking of supportive evidence for the predetermined choice. According to E.C. Webster, "that early decision can be biased by what business calls the 'old school tie syndrome', the tendency of interviewers to prefer applicants similar to themselves."

Districts using sophisticated selection techniques choose principals who tend not to fit the stereotype of the tall, white, male principal pushing middle age. Instead, in exemplary systems, Dentler told his interviewer, "we found more women, blacks, hispanics and Asian-Americans. And more short people." In other words, selection in these districts is not based on looks, personality, fit, or first impressions, but instead on merit. How do you determine a candidate's merit? The much maligned interview process is not without promise.

Selecting Interviewers

Districts can improve the interview process by recognizing that not all people are equally adept at interviewing candidates. Jensen lists five qualifications for teacher interviewers that are applicable to principal selectors as well. Districts should select interviewers who have these qualifications:

- alertness to cues
- ability to make fine distinctions, perceive accurately
- ability to make immediate and accurate records
- willingness to use criteria established by the organization
- ability to suppress biases

Determining the individuals to involve in the interview is an important decision districts must make. Several studies advise using parents, teachers, and principals on the interview team to acquire different perspectives, to create a sense of ownership in the process, and to gain support for the candidate who is finally selected. In exemplary districts, superintendents are heavily involved in establishing the principal selection process, but often wait to interview until the interview committee identifies two or three top candidates. According to the Baltzell and Dentler study, superintendents in exemplary districts

> delay involvement until the final moment in order to avoid any ap-

pearance of undue influence. If the perception gets out that it's a Good Old Person process, it's all over—you may as well get another superintendent.

Training the Interview Team

Involving a broad base of people in the screening and selection may complicate the process unless district personnel train those individuals in legal guidelines and multiple assessment techniques. A personnel director with whom I spoke said he conducts a four-hour training session with the screening and interview committee. Incorporated into this session are discussions of various laws that govern the selection process, such as "protected classes" of candidates, interviewing techniques, appropriate and inappropriate questions, and formulation of interview questions and procedures by the committee. Without such training, interviewers' choices may be unduly influenced by factors such as attitude congruence, first impressions, and personal biases.

Structuring the Interview

The reliability of the interview process is strengthened when the interview is structured: when candidates are asked the same, exact, predetermined, and well-thought-out questions. In addition, effective interviews include simulations, written exercises, and situational questions. This is in contrast to the practice of many districts, which conduct interviews in a causal manner, allowing candidates to actually control the flow of the interview.

A key element in exemplary districts' interview processes is the use of a set of situational questions that require candidates to formulate and provide answers to real-life school problems, such as the following:

1. As a principal, you face a student who has been sent to the office for making an obscene gesture to a teacher. The student reports that the teacher has on more than one occasion called him a "jerk" in front of the class. What are the issues and what will you do?
2. The district has a practice that athletic teams playing in a State championship late night game may come to school two hours late the following morning. The District also requires band and rally to attend the game. You are approached by members of the Rally squad and band who want the same consideration as that given the team because they are required to be in attendance. How will you respond?
3. You're the only administrator in the building. A parent bursts into your office and in loud, derisive language complains that a teacher has dealt unfairly with his student. The parent has a long list of complaints but focuses primarily on a recent classroom confrontation. The student has a history of being a troublemaker. How will you deal with the parent?

Performance simulations are another useful part of the interview process. Simulations require that applicants demonstrate certain skills for in-

terviewers. In one district that incorporates simulation exercises in the interview process, candidates individually view a twenty-minute classroom lesson, designed specifically for the interview simulation by a staff development teacher. The candidate then prepares an observation report and holds a conference with the staff development teacher who taught the lesson. A committee member observes this conference. Finally, the staff development teacher rates each candidate on his or her conferencing and observation skills. Written simulations on situational or inbasket problems are another exercise that districts can use.

Other Sources of Information

Most important, the interview team should consider information gathered in the interview along with information gathered from other sources: applications, transcripts, teaching and administrative performance, references, and assessment center data. If the finalists are not from within the system, districts should also conduct site visits in finalists' schools and communities to verify if the candidates are as good as they appear. If districts rely solely upon a thirty-to-sixty-minute interview to hire a principal, chances are high they will miss the best candidate.

In sum, exemplary districts use a comprehensive system to screen and select capable principals. They adopt written selection policies, develop specific selection criteria, identify the specific opening in vacancy announcements, involve and train a broad base of people in screening and selection, use multiple means of assessment, and consider varied sources of information about candidates.

Finding the most capable principals doesn't end with selection. Although the search for a principal ends when he or she is hired, the process is far from over. Selecting good leaders is only half the battle; the other half is helping them succeed and grow in the job. Well-organized postselection activities including orientations, professional development, opportunities for networking, and on-the-job assistance from experienced administrators are more likely to help newly hired principals succeed. The next section looks at the important task of inducting beginning principals into their position.

Inducting Principals

Induction programs for first-year teachers are becoming more commonplace in school systems throughout the country. Professional literature on teaching clearly establishes the crucial importance of the induction year in the career development of teachers. As a result, many states now mandate induction activities, such as mentor-teacher programs, for first-year teachers.

Even a cursory review of the literature on principals reveals that school districts are doing much less for the entry-year of principals. Although the issue

of principal preservice training has received increased attention from policy makers and educators recently, John Daresh notes it is surprising that relatively few studies of the needs of beginning principals "have been carried out during the past few years."

The studies that have been made reveal that beginning principals experience a great amount of frustration, anxiety, and a sense of being inadequately prepared for what they actually encounter once in the job. Because a principal's leadership is so vital for creating educational excellence, it is clear that school districts must begin addressing the needs of beginning principals so they can quickly begin leading, as opposed to just surviving.

This section addresses (1) how principals are inducted and the problems they encounter that might inhibit their effectiveness, (2) promising programs that might enhance beginning principals' effectiveness, and (3) the school district's role in assisting beginning principals.

Experiences of Beginning Principals

"This job isn't at all what I expected it would be like." Such statements, or unspoken thoughts, are common to many individuals new to a job. Everett Hughes has likened the plight of newcomers to a form of "reality shock," where individuals experience "surprises" that arise from differences between their "anticipatory socialization" (what they thought or were told the job would be like) and their actual experiences in the new setting.

From reports of principals about their first year on the job, the "shock of entry" is common among rookie administrators. When left on their own, many experience problems that may handicap their ability to provide the kind of leadership needed for school excellence. With this in mind, what are the surprises, frustrations, and problems that principals new to a school system face and how can school districts provide assistance for these fledgling administrators to help ensure their success once selected as the school's leader?

Isolation

For many beginning principals, the extreme isolation of the principalship comes as a shock. In addition to some brief orientations, many districts simply give newly hired principals the keys to the building and, in effect, say "sink or swim, you're on your own." Isolated and without guidance, newcomers often make mistakes that may have consequences weeks or months later.

Robert Nelson, in a study of beginning administrators in Northwest districts, found a common sense of isolation among newcomers. Although some administrators had previously worked in collaborative environments, there was "little opportunity to collaborate in their new position." Others, while not having come from a collaborative environment, told Nelson they "looked to administration as providing the autonomy to seek out collaborative opportunities with other administrators." Unfortunately, they also found little opportunity for working with other colleagues.

Daresh documented similar feelings of isolation and lack of collegial support among principals he studied in the Midwest. He recommends that districts develop strategies to reduce newcomers' isolation. "Ways need to be found to ensure that, whenever possible, new administrators are not left totally alone to solve problems in isolation from their colleagues." The isolation of principals contributes to many other problems that newcomers experience.

Technical Problems

Learning the technical aspects of the job is a second major problem that many new principals face. Beginning administrators report a wide variety of concerns in the technical or procedural area. Learning the logistics of many mundane, yet important, school system-specific procedures takes up a lot of beginning principals' time. For example, new principals must grapple with such concerns as how to read computer printouts provided by the district business office; how to set up for assemblies and lunch; how to address various legal issues; and how to operate the bells, clocks, and firebells.

After completing a study of beginning principals in the Midwest, Daresh wrote, "If any one single area of beginning administrator concerns could be classified as most powerful, this area of perceived lack of technical expertise related to how to follow established procedures was it." Because they receive little assistance from hiring officials or colleagues, many newcomers spend a lot of their time learning technical procedures that have little to do with leadership, but that are essential for the smooth operation of a school.

Socialization to the School System

A third major area of concern for new principals is "how to get things done" in the school system—socialization into the system. Beginning administrators in Nelson's study reported they were usually able to learn quickly the "logistics"; however, what was far more difficult to learn "were the strategies which the organization regarded as appropriate to the roles they assumed and the social relations in the organization."

Beginning principals in Daresh's study experienced similar socialization problems. For example, one principal told Daresh he felt rather foolish after following the procedures outlined in the school board policy manual regarding requests for new equipment for his building. Stated policy required that a formal application by the principal be filed with the assistant superintendent in charge of administrative services. After not getting any action on the piece of requested equipment that he felt he deserved, he found out that the "real" way things like that happened in his school system was for the principal to deal directly with the director of buildings and grounds and not bother the assistant superintendent who, after all, was too busy dealing with other matters that were not listed as his responsibility in the policy manual. Daresh notes:

> The new principal discovered this discrepancy between stated policy and real procedure only after talking to another, more experienced

> principal who noted that the request for equipment would probably only gather dust 'in somebody's in-basket' and would never be acted upon if 'normal channels' were followed.

"Learning the ropes," both the political and the social, of a particular district can be difficult for newly hired principals. Many important pieces of information about school system operations are unwritten and rookies must depend on others for "getting into the know."

New principals use different strategies, such as observing experienced principals, to obtain needed insight into the unwritten rules of the road. Unfortunately, beginners are often unable to observe veterans because they are physically isolated from other administrators or they do not believe they are good role models.

Communication with other principals is another strategy beginners can use to obtain needed information, but Nelson found that districts in his study did not facilitate needed interactions among administrators. Left on their own and not wanting to appear incompetent in the eyes of more experienced colleagues, some newcomers sought advice from individuals outside the school system. Nelson found that these discussions "did not present the organization-specific information that the newcomers sought."

Lack of Feedback

A fourth area of concern among beginning principals is lack of feedback on how they are doing. Performance evaluations by superiors can provide feedback and guidance to newly hired principals. Unfortunately, many beginners report such performance feedback is infrequent and, when done, not specific or helpful. Nelson found that most beginning administrators he interviewed "wished that they received more specific feedback from their superiors about their job performance. But formal feedback was rarely given."

Daresh reports similar concerns among beginning principals with whom he spoke.

> They never knew if they were really doing what was considered to be a good job, and no one in their schools or districts appeared inclined to provide much feedback or direction to help them understand how they were doing. This lack of feedback was an issue that principals felt from every level of the organization—superiors, peers, and subordinates.

Lack of feedback may contribute to new principals being tentative, indecisive, and anxious. It is clear that beginning principal performance may certainly be improved with specific feedback, encouragement, and guidance from successful and experienced administrators in or outside of a school system.

Given these problems of isolation, lack of technical guidance and socialization to the school system, and inadequate feedback, what training activities might help new principals to lead their schools? Some promising programs do exist.

Promising Induction Programs

As many principals report, preservice training never fully prepares them for the realities of principal life and most of their learning about the principalship occurs on the job. Learning how to be effective while on the job, especially without help or guidance, can be painful and ridden with chance. In an analysis of principals' work, Kent Peterson suggests several factors that may hinder on-the-job learning by principals:

1. Principals' preference for action in solving problems works against reflective self-assessment and learning.
2. Infrequent formal opportunities to share experiences with colleagues inhibit peer learning and prevent principals from capitalizing on a store-house of experience.
3. Professional growth and measurement of progress are hindered by feedback from superiors that is non-specific and abstract.

According to Stanley Schainker and LaRaine Roberts, "What emerges from practice and research is paradoxical: principals' most valuable source of learning is their on-the-job experience, yet the reality of that experience is seriously limited as a vehicle for learning." Clearly beginning principals need a structured and systematic process for learning how to effectively deal with various school-specific problems while on the job. Educators are beginning to recognize that school districts cannot afford to leave beginning principals alone to solve complex school problems, isolated from helpful colleagues. Thus, several institutions have begun the development of promising programs that can assist beginning principals.

Peer-Assisted Leadership

In fall 1983, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development began Peer-Assisted Leadership (PAL), a unique professional development activity that enables school principals to analyze their own leadership behavior and that of a peer partner in a nonprescriptive and nonjudgmental manner. During a year-long process, principals learn and apply various skills for collecting data about their partners and sharing that information with them in a useful way.

In describing the program, Bruce Barnett states that the PAL training consists of a series of six full-day meetings at intervals of about six weeks with trainers from the Instructional Management Program of the Far West Lab. During these meetings, participants learn various skills for gathering and analyzing information: shadowing techniques to observe their peer partner, reflective interviewing, advanced reflective interviewing and theme building, clustering data by themes, final model production, and model presentations. Between meetings, Barnett reports, principals apply the skills in carrying out observations and interviews that provide data about their partners' schools. By the last meeting, principals are prepared to present models of their partners' instructional management activities to the group as a whole.

As a result of the PAL process, participating principals indicate that they benefit from working with other principals and that they practice more self-reflection, a process found useful in helping them run their schools. Principals also report that they receive many new and helpful ideas from their partners about how to handle particular problems that they encounter. Since PAL's inception, several districts have involved principals in the program. When I interviewed Ginny Lee, PAL trainer, she said the San Diego School District has used the peer-assisted leadership program as part of its induction program for beginning principals. In San Diego, senior administrators are paired with rookies, and the partners implement PAL techniques in assisting each other on school-specific leadership concerns.

Lee reports that Far West Lab has developed a training-of-trainers component to the program to increase the number of administrators who can participate. Bruce Barnett and Faye Mueller, in a study of the long-term effects of the PAL training on principals, found that collegial observation and reflective feedback have lasting, positive effects on participating principals. Structured opportunities for greater collegial support, such as PAL, can help address many of the problems, frustrations, and concerns of beginning principals, namely isolation and lack of feedback.

Principals Inservice Program

A program that has a similar emphasis on collegial support is the Principals Inservice Program developed in 1979 by the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (/I/D/E/A/). James LaPlant, director of the project, suggests that most

> inservice education for principals can be characterized as a smorgasbord of opportunities splattered on the schoolhouse wall in a way which leaves principals trying to decide if the wall is part of a large mural, a piece of abstract art, or perhaps an unwanted act of vandalism.

To counter the typical methodology of exposing principals to a "bag of tricks" in a one-shot inservice session, /I/D/E/A/ developed their program to assist principals in establishing "long-term" collegial support groups to provide school-specific improvement. These groups, each headed by an /I/D/E/A/-trained facilitator, are usually composed of six-to-ten principals who meet monthly over a two-year period.

The goal of the program is to help principals improve their professional competence in leading school programs that will help children learn. To that end, principals meet as a group to openly explore problems in their schools that demand solutions. LaPlant states, "In a climate of openness, trust, and mutual assistance, principals become resources for ideas and peer reviews in their professional development and school improvement efforts." Outcomes of the program are as follows:

Personal Professional Development. The principal, as a member of

a collegial support group, designs, implements, and evaluates a personal professional development plan to increase his or her leadership capability.

School Improvement. The principal, as a member of a collegial support group, designs, implements, and evaluates a school improvement project to address an identified need within the school.

Collegial Support Group. Members of the collegial support group provide assistance and encouragement to one another as they engage in their professional development and school improvement efforts.

Continuous Improvement. The principal accepts responsibility for the achievement of personal professional development and school improvement goals.

In a study of participants in the /I/D/E/A/ program, Daresh (1982) concluded that collegial support is a sound practice with tremendous potential for improving the quality of inservice support available for local school principals:

> Particularly for beginning principals, the collegial support group concept allows administrators to work cooperatively to propose solutions for numerous daily problems and, even more important, to escape from the need to devote all their time and energy to daily managerial issues and tasks. Thus, principals are free to exercise a more creative approach to problem solving and may, over time, engage in the often illusive role of instructional leaders of their schools.

The /I/D/E/A/ program has become very popular among principals. According to Karen Fearing, administrative assistant at /I/D/E/A/, the Principals Inservice Program has expanded since its inception in 1978 to include 300 facilitators leading collegial support groups involving more than 3,000 principals from 28 states and 3 foreign countries. Collegial programs like PAL and Principals Inservice Program are just the type of support beginning principals need. Individual school districts, however, are the key. Districts must take the initiative to provide beginning principals with a variety of helpful induction activities.

The School District's Role

As mentioned in the section on training, universities and school districts can use a variety of bridging strategies to provide aspiring principals with practical administrative experience and knowledge to help them succeed in the principalship prior to their first position. Preservice training should not, however, be the only assistance that principals receive. In fact, it is naive to believe that preservice training or even out-of-district inservice programs will provide aspiring administrators with everything they need to know about how to be an effective leader in a particular school district. School districts, therefore, must continue training principals and provide newly hired administrators

with a variety of supportive induction activities to help them continue their professional growth as school leaders.

Orient Beginning Principals

Districts would be well advised to provide newly hired principals with a well-thought-out and comprehensive orientation program. Simply handing a new principal the keys and expecting him or her to learn district-specific procedures by trial and error should not be the norm. Scheduled orientations with the business office, transportation, maintenance, public relations, personnel, and other important school system offices should all be included as part of a comprehensive orientation program.

Personnel responsible for each area should provide newcomers with specific procedural details that will help them learn the technical procedures and expectations of the district. Simply handing new hirees vague job descriptions, district policy handbooks, curriculum guides, and collective bargaining agreements is an ineffective orientation strategy. Without the unwritten histories and rationale behind such policies and requirements, beginning principals will not know what to do, what is most and least important, what procedures are open to change or challenge, and why certain procedures are necessary.

In small school districts, orientation responsibility may fall upon the superintendent. In larger systems, orientations can be carried out by a well-coordinated team of senior administrators. Although central office administrators should play an important role in orienting beginning principals, experienced principals are probably the most valuable resource for orienting new hirees.

Institute a Buddy System

Many educators interested in the improvement of practice for beginning principals suggest that districts should pair veteran principals with rookies in a sort of "buddy system" to help newcomers learn the "informal ropes" of a district. A buddy system can help reduce the isolation that many beginning principals experience, and it lets successful veteran principals give newcomers a needed understanding of the norms of a district. As Daresh notes, "people in any organization are often judged according to their ability to read and interpret correctly what are often very subtle signs and signals." The intervention of a trusted colleague who helps the beginning principal to understand unspoken expectations may help "ensure newcomers greater success."

A buddy or mentor principal system should be instituted with caution, however. Unless they are carefully chosen and trained, mentor principals may squelch fresh innovations and new ideas that beginning principals bring to the school system. Untrained mentors may simply pass on ineffective practices to new principals, perpetuating traditional processes and norms that may need to change. Effective mentors, therefore, must not tell beginning principals what they should do, but instead guide newcomers so that they are able to make their own decisions, based on a thorough understanding of the potential consequen-

ces of their choices. As Daresh suggests, "Mentors who would try to make inexperienced principals behave as they would are probably not mentors at all."

Finding effective mentors may be difficult, especially for small districts. Smaller school systems may need to reach out to other districts for help in securing effective mentors. Educational service districts and professional associations may also need to facilitate cooperative mentor-mentee programs for districts not large enough to foster their own.

Structure Beginners' Workload

Beginning principals need a great deal of time in their buildings to develop productive working relationships with staff, students, and parents and to assess various aspects of their schools' programs and operations. Hence, senior administrators must protect beginners from activities that require them to divert energy away from learning about their school. For example, districts should not immerse newly hired principals in a variety of district projects and committees. Such a practice only adds to the complexities of learning the system. Veteran principals often complain about being pulled out of their buildings to attend meetings called by the district office; for newcomers, such a practice can be even more detrimental.

Give Beginning Principals Feedback

Districts should develop a system whereby beginning principals are provided with specific and constructive feedback on their performance. Principals' supervisors can provide this type of feedback, but it requires a great deal of time observing rookies and working with them. Because superiors may be judgmental in their assessments and are often extensively involved in other district responsibilities, many educators recommend a collegial supervisory model, such as Peer-Assisted Leadership and Principals Inservice Program, to provide principals with feedback.

Develop a Plan for Professional Growth

If beginning principals are to continue to develop leadership skills and grow professionally, districts must assess newcomers' general leadership strengths and weaknesses as well as their skills and knowledge regarding district-specific priorities. Such assessments can be as formal as the NASSP assessment center simulations or can be tailored to fit each particular district's needs. Superiors, colleagues, and beginners should all be involved in assessing a newcomer's needs and then help the beginner develop a plan for growth that includes specific learning objectives, activities to help in the development process, an implementation time line, and an evaluation plan.

Facilitate Reflective Activities

Districts should encourage, or even require, that beginning principals and successful veterans observe each other to reduce newcomer isolation and

to improve their work through a process of peer observation. Such an activity should not only include time to observe, but time for reflective analysis between participants.

Districts should also bring together beginning principals in reflective seminars to discuss their experiences and to offer suggestions for handling specific problems. Because most districts do not have a large enough number of beginning principals to create such peer interaction, cooperative arrangements between districts will probably be necessary. Again, state professional associations, educational service districts, and even universities can assist in coordinating seminars that bring beginning principals together for supportive and reflective discussions.

Conclusion

The principalship is probably the single most powerful force for improving school effectiveness and for achieving excellence in education. The familiar adage "so goes the principal, so goes the school" is on the mark in characterizing the importance of a principal's leadership. Although better preparation and selection of school leaders is not the complete remedy for educational problems, it offers an important beginning.

An effective preparation process based on a clear view of the principal's role, combined with better recruitment, selection, and induction techniques, can help usher in a new era of productivity in American schools. As the U.S. Department of Education's *Principal Selection Guide* states, the preparation, selection, orientation, and development of school leaders "is one of the most economical options for significantly improving schools."

School districts, therefore, cannot afford to leave the identification, preparation, and selection of outstanding principals to chance. Instead, school systems, in cooperation with universities, must be committed, both in policy and action backed with sufficient resources, to train cadres of aspirants to ensure an adequate pool of candidates. Then school systems must use sound selection methods to pick the best. Getting a "cracker-jack" principal does not, however, end with selection. School districts must also develop a comprehensive set of induction procedures for orienting and supporting new hirees. If they don't, even the best principals will never achieve their full potential and they may even wither on the vine.

Effective school reform does not and will not occur as a result of edicts from Washington or from state capitols, but instead educational improvement happens school by school, initiated and guided by capable school principals. Thus, developing, selecting, and supporting school leaders is a key for achieving the excellence in education that American school children need and deserve.